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# Call Made to Give Jets Missile-Defense System

By Elaine S. Povich  
WASHINGTON BUREAU

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Washington - Rep. Steve Israel (D-Dix Hills) and Sens. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) yesterday called for equipping passenger airliners with missile-defense systems as a protection against portable, shoulder-fired missiles that might be used by terrorists.

The three lawmakers, hefting a shoulder-fired missile that they brought into the Capitol for a demonstration, estimated it would take about \$10 billion to retrofit the entire U.S. commercial jet fleet - some 6,800 airliners. They proposed to take the money from President George W. Bush's budget for a missile defense system.

"This is not a hysterical hypothetical," Israel said. "This is a clear and present danger."

Israel and Schumer both noted that airports like LaGuardia are located near populated areas and provide plenty of cover for terrorists to surreptitiously move in with a light missile weapon, fire it at an aircraft, then drive off into traffic undetected.

Last November, an Israeli passenger plane escaped being shot down over Kenya because two missiles fired from a shoulder launcher at the plane apparently were old and inaccurate, according to Israeli experts, not because of missile defense systems. Nonetheless, defense systems are being installed on many Israeli passenger planes, including those of El Al.

Some military aircraft already carry antisurface-to-air-missile systems. Such systems either use flares to re-direct heat-seeking missiles away from the aircraft or other electronic countermeasures to interfere with the incoming weapon.

Two Long Island companies make the missile-defense systems, Edo Corp. with plants in Deer Park and North Amityville, and Northrop-Grumman Corp., with facilities in Melville and Bethpage.

Northrop-Grumman makes a directional infrared countermeasure jammer, which is being installed on 29 military special forces helicopters at about \$220 million, according to Andrew Koch, Washington Bureau Chief for Janes Defense Weekly, the authoritative military affairs publication.

EDO manufactures missile defense systems for the B-1 Stealth bomber. "The technology exists on the military side," said executive vice president Frank Otto. "It's a question of how we can take the military technology and apply it to the commercial."

He noted that some of the countermeasures, such as flares, are not designed to be

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deployed over populated areas. Boxer said the lawmakers were not considering that type of anti-missile weapon.

Robert Johnson, spokesman for the Transportation Security Administration, said his agency would follow the lead of Congress on installing missile defense systems. Michael Wascom, spokesman for the Air Transport Association, which represents airlines, said commercial carriers are aware of the threat and would work with government on anti terrorist efforts.

"I think the question has to be asked: Should commercial passenger aircraft be expected to perform the same functions as military aircraft?" he said. "In general we don't think so."

A former Capitol Hill staff aide and retired Air Force expert on missile defense said commercial airlines also worry about the space such systems would take up and the weight they would add to planes. In addition, the aide said, it is "hard to defeat a heat-seeking missile at low altitude with a commercial aircraft. You would be better off protecting the perimeter of the airport."

The lawmakers included a stepped-up perimeter protection plan in their legislation as well but said an anti-missile system is also needed.

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